



March 4, 2004

Senate Republicans Respond to Democrat Attacks on Why We Went to War to Remove Saddam Hussein

On March 2, Senate Republicans, led by Policy Committee Chairman Jon Kyl and Majority Leader Bill Frist, countered Democrats' criticisms of the Bush Administration for its use of force against Saddam Hussein. Excerpts from Republicans follow (source: Congressional Record).

On the Policy of Regime Change and the Justification to Use Force:

"Upon entering office in January 2001, President Bush inherited from the Clinton administration a policy of regime change. I repeat, **the Bush administration pursued the same Iraqi policy as the Clinton administration.** That policy was based on the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act. . . . This policy was unanimously approved by this Senate." *Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ)*

"I point out the focus of President Clinton's [February 1998] statements was on the totality of our knowledge about Saddam Hussein's history, his defiance of the United Nations, use of chemical weapons, aggression against his neighbors, savage treatment of his own people. This is what we had to gauge his intentions by. **This broad focus on Saddam's past actions and known capabilities, not any particular piece of intelligence, was also what prompted many Members of this body to authorize force against Iraq in October 2002.**" *Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ)*

"On another note, I am fairly confident that the Iraqi people do not believe for a minute that their liberation is any less legitimate because we have yet to find stockpiles of WMD. . . . There is no doubt that Iraqis and Americans alike are better off now that Saddam Hussein is in prison and his evil sons have met their end." *Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)*

"I don't think we need to apologize to the United Nations for enforcing their resolution 1441 that passed by a unanimous vote in the Security Council and which David Kay has now said Saddam Hussein was in complete violation of." *Sen. Robert Bennett (R-UT)*

"Some seem to suggest that even though we know Saddam Hussein continued to develop ballistic missiles prohibited by the U.N., our military effort was illegitimate because we have not yet found WMD warheads or the missiles. **I can confidently state that Saddam's ballistic missiles were not for the Iraqi space program.**" *Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)*

“After 9/11, the President of the United States was a challenged leader. He faced difficult times. We lost 3,000 people. Some decisions had to be made. He decided that business as usual would not continue and the United States was going to have to take a leadership role against terrorism. . . . **We gave [Saddam] every chance to renounce weapons of mass destruction**, and to demonstrate that he had complied with multiple U.N resolutions. . . **he refused to do so.”** *Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL)*

“**Had the United States not acted in Iraq, could anyone say with any confidence that Saddam would not be plotting our doom**, that his sons would not be torturing the Iraqi people, and that his regime would not be preparing to rebuild the WMD infrastructure we all have agreed Hussein once had? In conclusion, Madam President, it is more than enough to justify the war in Iraq and the liberation of the Iraqi people.” *Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)*

“**No other Western government or intelligence government could explain it, nor could the United States verify that the gap had been closed by the cooperation of the Iraqi regime in proving the destruction of these weapons.** This was a requirement, by the way, under international law, made to the international community, a requirement that was the result of the cessation of hostilities at the end of the first gulf war, a requirement, that unmet, left that war unresolved, unconcluded, and therefore without a promise of peace.” *Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT)*

On Pre-War Intelligence and the “Misleading” of the American Public:

“I feel compelled to point out three obvious facts: One, an intelligence failure is not synonymous with a misuse of intelligence. Two, this intelligence issue does not fundamentally change the case against Saddam Hussein. Three, since Iraq itself had provided documentation to the United Nations on its production of chemical and biological agents, **the question is not whether but what happened to the stockpiles.”** *Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ)*

“The fact remains **the Bush administration relied largely on the same intelligence information used by the Clinton administration during the late 1990s, the same information that was available to Senators and about which they spoke on this floor.** . . . David Kay recently stated in his testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, ‘If you read the total body of intelligence in the last 12 to 15 years that flowed on Iraq, I quite frankly think **it would be hard to come to a conclusion other than Iraq was a gathering, serious threat to the world with regard to WMD.**’” *Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ)*

“Last January, I met with this group of Kurdish doctors in my office, just down the hall... **They shared with me that they knew the war to topple Saddam Hussein was near, and they were concerned--these are Iraqi physicians — that they would be attacked with chemical and biological weapons. . . . Their fear — these doctors’ fear, the doctors from Iraq — was not based on intelligence briefings. Their fear was based on experience. Their fear was based on reality.** Their fear was based on what they had seen, and their fear was based on what they had actually treated, that is, chemical weapons, weapons of mass destruction.” *Sen. Bill Frist (R-TN)*

“In December of 1998, in an Oval Office address, President Clinton said this, and I take just one sentence: ‘I have no doubt today that, left unchecked, Saddam Hussein will use these terrible weapons again.’ That was the President of the United States responding to the intelligence he was given. I know some colleagues have said the current administration hasn’t qualified the intelligence enough. They have not said we think or we judge.... **Here is President Clinton saying, ‘I have no doubt today.’ That is not caveated or qualified.”** *Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ)*

“I want to first make it clear that it has been my experience that the stifling problem of risk aversion went from Washington to the field, and not vice versa. . . . Risk aversion starts when elected officials, on whose support the CIA depends, in the face of failure as well as success, abandons the discipline. **The ‘end of the cold war’ and ‘peace dividend’ type arguments of those in the other party during the 1990s clearly manifested themselves in the form of political abandonment of our intelligence community.**” *Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA)*

“It should not be surprising that when the politicians turn their back on the intelligence community, politically appointed intelligence [senior officials] start to become more reluctant to approve operations that might result in some sort of political flap because they know they won’t be supported. When such intelligence seniors start to become overly conservative, the managers below them follow suit. After a while, bureaucratic obstacles, and other hoops through which field officers must jump before getting operations approved, start to appear. That is where you get the [former DCI John] Deutch guidelines and the Deutch asset scrub.” *Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA)*

“But given all the information we had about Saddam’s history of using and producing weapons of mass destruction, his aggressive intentions, and the intelligence community’s high confidence in the key areas of assessment, it is difficult to imagine how the administration could have determined Iraq was not a threat that needed to be dealt with immediately. So, no, there may have been mistakes in intelligence. We have yet to find that out. **But there was not. . . . an attempt to mislead by the administration.**” *Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ)*

On Whether the Threat was “Imminent”:

“I want to also make it clear the President and the administration never claimed Iraq posed an imminent threat, as some have said. To the contrary, administration officials said the United States and the international community needed to act before it became imminent. Indeed, President Bush challenged those who wanted to wait until the threat was imminent in his 2003 State of the Union address. . . . **Administration officials did use words like ‘immediate’ and ‘urgent’ but more to convey the importance of dealing with the threat they judged to be growing; that they did not imply or state was imminent, in other words, that the attack was about to occur. They did not say that.**” *Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ)*

“I went back and read a key quote from the President’s State of the Union address in 2003 in which he declared to us, the American people, and to the world: ‘Some have said we must not act until the threat is imminent. Since when have terrorists and tyrants announced their intentions politely, putting us on notice before they strike? If this threat is permitted to fully and suddenly emerge, all actions, all words, and all recriminations would come too late.’ **That is what he said, and it was right then, and it is right today.**” *Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT)*

“Imminence becomes even murkier in an era of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. When did the threat of Al-Qaeda become imminent? I know when it became manifest. Not, by the way, on September 11. Osama bin Laden had struck many times before then. On September 11, the threat became catastrophic. It was well beyond manifest. It was well beyond imminent.” *Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT)*

Excerpts from Summary by Senator Kyl (emphasis added):

“The reason we took to the floor is because **there has been a lot of criticism of the President of the United States and the administration for its actions in finally deciding that enough was enough with Saddam Hussein**, that his continual violation of the U.N. resolutions had to be enforced by someone, and that before there was an imminent threat posed by his dangerous regime, it was important for the United States and a coalition of other countries to take action to remove him.”

“The criticism has come both from potential Democratic nominees for President, Members of this body, news organizations, and others outside the body, but . . . **there should be no question that President Bush did the right thing.**”

“**The three key points were, first**, that an intelligence failure is not the same thing as intelligence misuse or misleading, and if there was a failure because the intelligence agencies were wrong about the stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, . . . it is not the same thing as saying that the President misled anyone or that anyone else with access to intelligence misled anyone.”

“**The second point** was that whatever the state of intelligence, the case for removing Saddam Hussein is still very strong, a point which several of our colleagues have made repeatedly on both sides of the aisle, as well as President Clinton and other members of his administration prior to the Bush administration.”

“**And, third**, that the question regarding the weapons of mass destruction, the stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons is not a matter of whether they existed but what happened to them; that everyone who had access to the intelligence was convinced they existed...”

“Those of us on the Intelligence Committee had access to the same intelligence the President did, at least similar intelligence to what other countries in the world had, and all of us believed these things. **We had the same intelligence that was given to the President.** We were not misleading anyone. The President obviously was not misleading anyone. **The fact that it turns out some of the intelligence turned out not to be totally correct is not the same thing as saying somebody misused the intelligence.**”

“**I hope my colleagues on the other side do not cross that line of accusing the President of intentionally misleading the American people because to do so, in effect, would be also to accuse our own colleagues of that very same thing.** I do not believe, based upon what I know of my colleagues, that that could be said of any one of them. So I hope we can get over this notion that just because not all the intelligence was correct, therefore, it must mean somebody was misleading someone else. I think we have established that is not true, and that it would be very wrong to try to pursue that line of attack against President Bush simply because we happen to be in an election year.”